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INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 002834

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/18/2019  
TAGS: KDEM PGOV PREL AF  
SUBJECT: ABDULLAH: EAGER FOR RUN-OFF CHALLENGE AND  
POST-ELECTION FUTURE

REF: KABUL 2768

Classified By: D/Ambassador Francis Ricciardone for reasons 1.4 (b) and  
(d)

¶1. (S) Summary: Presidential candidate Abdullah Abudullah is adamant that he will not be part of a new Karzai government. He believes that if Afghanistan's electoral bodies are "thorough," a second round will be necessary, and he is confident he can prevail against Karzai because the incumbent's true intentions have been revealed through massive, systemic fraud. In the event Abdullah loses on the first or second round, he intends to build a "New Wave" party whose base will be Afghan youth who seek a new direction for their country. He fears, however, that if Karzai is re-elected, state institutions will be weakened and overshadowed by parallel, criminal elements, and Karzai will mastermind a Constitutional amendment allowing him to run for a third term, or indefinitely. End Summary.

¶2. (S) Karzai political rival Abdullah dined at the Ambassador's residence on September 16. He had not heard the Independent Election Commission's (IEC) announcement of the final preliminary results, which showed Karzai leading with 54.6 percent followed by Abdullah with 27.7 percent. He jokingly quipped that he was out of the elections circuit. Attired in an Afghan-Western melange, a white Kemis and black suede blazer and loafers, Abdullah at first appeared subdued, possibly resigned, but as the evening progressed, he regained some of his customary energy and determination.

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Why Abdullah Broke with Karzai  
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¶3. (S) Dr. Abdullah first launched on a lengthy explanation of his parting of ways with Karzai. As early as 2004, he had started to realize that Karzai's priorities were his personal ambitions rather than the good of the country. However, Abdullah continued for some time at the helm of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and implemented much-needed reforms, including recruiting and grooming a new generation of diplomats. He suspected, however, that as Foreign Minister, he had gained a level of international renown that Karzai resented. In March, 2006 while he was on an official mission to the United States, Karzai called him to offer him a new cabinet position: either the Minister of Commerce, or the leadership of a "super" Economic Ministry. Abdullah declined. While in Washington, the news broke that he was no longer Minister. Secretary Rice, who had seen him earlier, asked to see him again. He warned her that Karzai would lead Afghanistan along the wrong path.

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IEC Reform Essential  
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¶4. (S) Abdullah next directed his attention to the Independent Elections Commission (IEC). Irrespective of the outcome of this election, the IEC leadership, among them, Secretariat Chief Najafi and President Lordin, must be replaced with truly independent, professional individuals, he said. The current leadership had cast its fate with Karzai; their relatives served in the Palace and in other parts of the current government. He believed that if the IEC were "reformed," parliamentary elections, scheduled for April-May 2010 could probably be held on time, or a few months later, as had been the case with the presidential and provincial council elections.

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If the IEC/ECC Are Thorough, There Will Be a Run-off  
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¶5. (S) Abdullah asserted that if the Independent Elections Commission (IEC) and the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) do a responsible and thorough job, a second round will be necessary. He said that the fraud was massive, citing examples of polling stations where two to four times the registered voters had cast ballots and claiming that the number of voter cards more than doubled the population in many pro-Karzai areas. To the Ambassador's observation that Abdullah's chances of winning a second round could be remote because the winner of a "silver medal" is not considered the victor, Abdullah replied he was confident he could prevail against Karzai in a run-off. Now that incumbent's true intentions were revealed through deliberate and systemic fraud, he argued, more people would cast their lot with Abdullah. He asserted that a second round would restore

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people's faith and they would vote despite poor security conditions. Further, Afghan youth were energized increasingly backing him; the youth vote would help him win a second round.

¶6. (S) Abdullah also commented that when he started the presidential campaign he was untested. Since then, he had learned from his campaign mistakes and the dirty tricks of Karzai, and was now more prepared to tackle a run-off. Abdullah cited a Karzai set-up into which he had fallen when he was campaigning in Daikundi Province: someone had slipped him a piece of paper with names of supposed local heroes for him to praise; it turned out the list included the name of a convicted assassin of the region's martyr, whose grave lay just a few feet away. His citation of the assassin among the local heroes cost him the confidence and votes of the audience.

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Seeking a Win-Win Scenario  
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¶7. (S) Abdullah agreed with the Ambassador that he could be seen as a victor even if he lost the first round because he had offered a genuine alternative to the Afghan people. If he were to lose, Abdullah would establish a "New Wave" party whose base will be Afghan youth seeking a new direction for their country, not the Northern Alliance. He was certain that after years of occupation, Taliban oppression, terrorism, and now fraud, Afghans yearn for a change. Abdullah was confident that if the IEC is reformed, "and if I live," he and his party would be well poised to succeed in the 2010 Parliamentary elections. He would also advance his initiative to establish a parliamentary system in Afghanistan.

¶8. (S) Returning to the subject of a possible second round, Abdullah conceded that people could construe his insistence on competing as putting his personal interests above the nation's, given that a second round would be contentious and people would have to risk their lives to return to the polls. However, the alternative, Karzai was worse. Even many Pashtuns no longer support Karzai because the fraud made a

mockery out of their genuine votes, argued Abdullah.

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I Will Not Join a Karzai Government  
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¶9. (S) Abdullah was adamant that he would not join a future Karzai government. He said that Lower House Speaker Yunis Qanooni, who was his primary intermediary with Karzai, was currently on the lesser pilgrimage. Abdullah had recently seen Karzai running-mate Marshall Fahim at the anniversary of Massoud's martyrdom in Panjshir, but they had discussed banalities, not politics. He would likely see him again in Panjshir during the upcoming Eid holiday, but did not expect anything to come of it. Abdullah speculated that if he has the chance to talk to Fahim alone he will tell him, "You have made your last mistake."

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The Worst-Case Scenario  
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¶10. (S) Abdullah predicted that if re-elected, Karzai would allow state institutions to be overrun by parallel, criminal elements. He alleged that criminal elements were already the underpinnings of Karzai's current administration; this Narco-Taliban-criminal nexus was bizarre and dangerous. Karzai would first try to control intelligence, then the informal security militias (he claimed some were already working for Karzai's political interests), and eventually, the police and possibly military. He claimed that Karzai was already engaging the Hizb-i- Islami to check the Taliban insurgency. Abdullah feared that Karzai would also seek to control Parliament; he was already maneuvering to place loyalists in the legislature. Karzai would likely mastermind a Constitutional amendment allowing him to run for a third term, or indefinitely, warned Abdullah.

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